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*Hebrew, Gender, and Modernity: Critical Responses to Dvora Baron's Fiction* (review)

Philip Hollander

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preparing it and is sure to be a companion to all scholars and students researching *Kerem Hemed*.

*Tirza Lemberger*  
*Institut fuer Judaistik*  
*Universitaet Wien*  
*tirza.lemburger@univie.ac.at*

**HEBREW, GENDER, AND MODERNITY: CRITICAL RESPONSES TO DVORA BARON'S FICTION.** Edited by Sheila E. Jelen and Shachar Pinsker. Studies and Texts in Jewish History and Culture 14. Pp. 287. Bethesda, Md.: University Press of Maryland, 2007. Paper, \$25.00.

Soon after her early twentieth century debut, Dvora Baron achieved wide acclaim. Yet it rested upon the patronizing attitude of a male literary establishment that viewed a woman writer's very existence as a harbinger of the Hebrew literary revival's future success. In the early state period, serious literary investigation finally replaced this condescension. Nonetheless, Baron's scattered literary corpus inhibited fuller understanding of her prose. Consequently, when a volume containing her uncollected works written between 1902 and 1921 was published in 1988, scholarship on her work was poised for a breakthrough. Soon a new generation of scholars drawing on theoretical advances in the study of women's writing, modernism, Zionism, and gender studies, turned to it. In addition to demonstrating the literary sophistication of Baron's prose, these scholars explored how it contributed to Hebrew literature and Jewish women's writing while simultaneously critiquing traditional Jewish gender roles, Zionism, and the Jewish canon's male orientation.

After presenting a short introduction to Baron and the state of criticism on her work, the present volume's editors, members of this new generation, offer ten scholarly essays on Baron's work that are divided into four sections. In addition, they provide English versions of three stories meant to accompany essays focusing upon the originals' analysis.

The first section contains translated articles written by pioneering critics of Baron's work that shaped subsequent scholarship. Comparing Baron's Hebrew literary work with that of her male contemporaries, Dan Miron points to a number of important differences. Not only is the uprooted figure so prominent in her male contemporaries' work nearly absent, Baron's fiction eschews portrayal of many of the central historical changes facing Jews in East Europe and pre-state Israel. Instead, he argues, Baron employed a

mythic approach to Jewish life stressing continuity over rupture. In her essay, which provides details of Baron's prose written between 1902 and 1921, Nurit Govrin asserts that these stories show Baron's gradual stylistic and intellectual maturation. As a result, she views Baron's decision not to republish these works in her lifetime as the result of her belief that they did not meet her later aesthetic standards.

The second set of essays, written by Wendy Zierler, Orly Lubin, and Avraham Balaban, focuses on how Baron's stories treat the place of women in Jewish society, including their relationship to the literary tradition and the emergent Zionist movement. In her insightful essay, Zierler gives an alternative response to the issue of Baron's difference first raised by Miron. She convincingly argues that through skillful use of traditional Jewish religious texts, as well as sub-canonical women's genres, Baron asserted Jewish women's rightful place in the world of Jewish learning and writing and carved out a place for subsequent women writers. Lubin's translated essay dissents from Miron's view of the mythic character of Baron's work. Lubin argues that Baron's fiction critiques the Zionist narrative and the central place it assigns to men to present an alternative feminine history that highlights the minutiae of hearth and home, where women make critical contributions to the Jewish future. Concurring with Govrin's position on the gradual development of Baron's work, Balaban demonstrates how Baron's later work employs subtle literary techniques to more effectively voice protest against gender inequality in Jewish society, a topic running throughout her corpus.

In the third section, essays written by Marc Bernstein and Shachar Pinsker employ intertextuality as a springboard for discussion of Baron's work's relationship to that of her male contemporaries and its ongoing role in critique of Zionism. Bernstein's essay explores Baron's 1920 story "*Agunah*" as a literary response to Agnon's 1908 story "*Agunot*." While Agnon universalizes the condition of the *agunah*, or chained wife, to voice the modern condition, Baron, Bernstein argues, restricts this figure's use. By doing so, she highlighted the plight of Jewish women frequently overlooked in broader portrayals of East European Jewish life. Additionally, by demonstrating the skilled artistry of an uncollected story, Bernstein challenges the developmental theory asserted by Govrin. In his complex and challenging essay, Pinsker, like Lubin, dissents from Miron's assertion concerning the mythic character of Baron's work. Pinsker views it as actively struggling with Zionist efforts to break with the Diasporic past rather than merely mythologizing it. By stressing aspects of East European Jewish life, such as Jewish religion, Yiddish, and female forms of expression, Baron promoted an alternative Zionist future offering greater continuity with the past.

Finally the collection's fourth section features essays by Sheila Jelen and Naomi Seidman exploring how Baron challenged the canonical boundaries of Hebrew and Yiddish literatures. Miron's observation about the uprooted figure's almost complete absence in Baron's fiction serves as Jelen's starting point. She argues the intentionality of this absence. With the Hebrew canon preoccupied with the uprooted figure's employment in efforts to masculinize both Jewish men and the Jewish nation, the voicing of Jewish women's condition required alternative character types such as one Baron developed. In an essay meshing well with Bernstein's aforementioned work, Seidman points to the chained wife's previously unrecognized importance in the *shtetl*'s literary depiction, specifically in scene's portraying individual departure. While these scenes typically employ elements drawn from the Exodus to provide a positive spin, the presence of chained wives conveys ambivalent feelings of the male characters and authors. Alongside newfound freedom, abandonment of the *shtetl*, like abandonment of a wife, involved loss and a sense of betrayal. Rather than privileging these departing men and their feelings, Baron, Seidman argues, challenges their perception. In the story "Fedka," for example, Baron presents a *shtetl*'s abandoned women as sexually vibrant as a way of questioning the necessity of Jewish exile's abandonment.

This compelling volume provides a polyphonous introduction to early twentieth century Hebrew literature, pointing to Baron's work's ability to contribute to scholarship in diverse areas, and justly ensconces her as one of the period's leading figures. Yet, while intended for undergraduate use, some of its essays seem unsuited for this aim. Nonetheless, it can serve as a model for future volumes that could greatly contribute to undergraduate instruction in Hebrew literature in America.

*Philip Hollander*

*University of Wisconsin—Madison*

*Madison, WI 53706*

*phollander@wisc.edu*

והיא תהילתך: עיונים ביצירות ש"י עגנון, א"ב יהושע ועמוס עוז  
(Ve-Hi Tehilatekha: Studies in the works of S. Y. Agnon, A. B. Yehoshua,  
and Amos Oz). By Nitza Ben-Dov. Pp. 336. Tel Aviv: Schocken, 2006.  
Paper.

In his book *The New Wave in Hebrew Literature*, published in 1971, Gershon Shaked described the developments in Hebrew literature during the